Sociology 3111  Research Methods  
BEH S 112         6:00PM-8:45 Wed.  
Fall 2009

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Office Hours:   Wed before and after class and by appointment

The **focus of this course** will be learning and practicing how sociologists are able to describe and explain social life. You will learn about the logic of scientific explanations of social relations and social institutions. You will explore the techniques and methods which sociologists use to gather the information they use in attempting to explain, and verify their explanations of, various social relations. You will learn to use some of these techniques in your own research. The course will also cover some of the assumptions underlying these methods, and ethical issues involved in social science research will be covered as well. The class uses lectures, reading, exercises, and applications to teach about how sociologists go about collecting data that helps them learn about social life.

**Objectives** of the course include:

- Become familiar with various methods used in sociological research;
- Understand the logic for choosing particular data collection methods and techniques, and learn to organize the data to address particular questions and problems.;
- Learn to make informed, critical judgments about research in sociology courses, as well as social research presented in the mass media.
- Learn how to design a research project and to communicate findings from this research to appropriate audiences.

The course will employ group discussions, in-class exercises, and traditional lectures. Assignments and other information, including supplemental reading and some lecture notes will be available on Web-CT. Students should check for course material and announcements on Web-CT on a regular basis.

At the end of the course, there will be a student organized conference in which each member of the class will present and discuss the results of his/her own research project/proposal.

The course fulfills the upper-division writing requirement (CW) for the University of Utah.

**Evaluation** of students will be based on nine assignments, class participation, and a research proposal and presentation. Each of the nine assignments count for 6% of the final grade, as does class participation. The written proposal and presentation count for 40% of the final grade. There will be *no extra credit work* available, and except in exceptional circumstances, arranged in advance with justification carefully documented, there will be no make-up work.
Late assignments will be accepted for partial credit. Since the reading and in-class material (i.e., lecture, discussion, videos, etc.) will not always overlap, it is important that students both complete the reading as scheduled (below) and attend class.

Special Accommodations
The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services (CDS), 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services. Please discuss any concerns with the professor before they become problems.

Academic Misconduct
You must understand that all work submitted to a professor is your own work. When you have used ideas of others, you must properly indicate that you have done so. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punished by failure on an individual assignment, failure in the course, and/or expulsion from the university. All students should be familiar with the University of Utah Student Code http://www.admin.utah.edu/ppmanual/8/8-10.html. A copy will be distributed during the first week of the course.

Required Reading
There are two recommended textbooks. Additional reading assignments may be made available through web-CT. All readings should be completed prior to the class they are assigned.


Other: Assignments from news media may be made from time to time.

Attendance & Participation:
Learning through practice as well as through lecture requires regular, consistent attendance and active participation in the class. Active participation means asking and answering questions during lectures, participating in in-class activities, and coming to class prepared.

Assignments
There will be many assignments throughout the term. All assignments are to be done individually. Refer to the assignment sheet for objectives, instructions, and grading criteria for each.

Research Project:
Students will complete their own research project throughout the semester. The project includes choosing a unique research topic, designing an appropriate study, collecting and analyzing data, and presenting the research findings in both a written and oral format.

**GRADING**
Final grades will be calculated as a weighted average of nine assignments, class participation and one final paper and presentation.

**Assignments 60%**
**Final Project 40%**

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All grades will be posted on Web-CT. It is the student’s responsibility to report and discuss grade discrepancies with the instructor as soon as they are noticed. Assignments may be accepted late for partial (half) credit. Extra credit will not be available. Final grades will not be curved.
Reading/Topic/Assignment Schedule

Week 1  August 26  Introductions, the Syllabus, and The Goals of Social Science Research

*Reading: Chapter 1*

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Week 2  September 2  A. The Logic of Scientific Discovery & The Role of Theory in Social Research.
B. Ethics in Social Research

*Reading: Chapter 1 & 3, Appendix C.*

Assignment #1: IRB Ethics Certification

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Week 3  September 9  Correlation & Causation

*Reading: Chapters 2 & 6*

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Week 4  September 16  Literature Reviews, Research Design, & The Research Report

*Extra readings*

Assignment #2: Topic Approval

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Week 5  September 23  A. Concepts & Operationalization/Measurement/Observation
B. Experimental Research Designs

*Reading: Chapter 4& ?*

Assignment #3: Literature Review

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Week 6  September 30  Sampling

*Reading: Chapter 5*
Week 7   October 7   Survey Research

*Reading: Chapter 8*

Assignment #4: Draft of “Intro”

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Week 8   October 14   No Class: Fall Break

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Week 9   October 21   A. Data Collection
               B. Qualitative Methods

*Reading: Chapter 9*

Assignment #5: Surveys

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Week 10  October 28   A. Qualitative Methods
                   B. Data Collection

*Reading: Chapter 15*

Assignment #6: Qualitative Methods

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Week 11  November 4   A. Writing & Presenting
                   B. Quantitative Data Analyses

*Chapter 14; Appendix F*

Assignment #7: Draft of “Methods”

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Week 12  November 11  Qualitative Data Analyses

*Reading: Chapter 10; Appendix G*

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Week 13  November 18  Discussing Research Findings

Assignment #8: Draft of “Results”
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<th>Week 14</th>
<th>November 25</th>
<th>Presenting, Writing, Revising</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 15</td>
<td>December 2</td>
<td>Student Research Conference</td>
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<td>Week 16</td>
<td>December 9</td>
<td>Student Research Conference</td>
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<td>Assignment #9: Self-Evaluation Essay</td>
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<td>EXAM</td>
<td>December 16</td>
<td>Turn in Final Research Report by 6PM</td>
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REQUIRED PERIODIC ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments Due Date
1. Conducting Ethical Research   Sep 3
2. Topic Approval     Sep 17
3. Conducting Literature Reviews   Sep 24
4. Draft of “Intro”               Oct 8
5. Writing a Good Survey         Oct 27
6. Collecting Qualitative Data   Oct 29
7. Draft of “Methods”            Nov 5
8. Draft of “Results”            Nov 19
9. Self-Evaluation & Self-Reflection Dec 10

Grading
The instructor will grade each on a ten-point scale according to the following guidelines:

10 EXCELLENT The student exhibits a critical understanding of the concepts, can articulate concepts in his/her own words, and shows an active mastery over the concepts. The work shows creativity and innovative thinking. Written work is complete, on-time, and is free from errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The assignment adheres to all instructions. The assignment is perfect or near perfect.

9 VERY GOOD The student’s work shows a good mastery of the subject. Some innovation, creativity, and critical thought, but may show some very minor lapses in reasoning or understanding. Written work is complete, on-time, and is free from errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The assignment adheres to all instructions.

7-8 GOOD The student’s work shows a basic mastery of the subject. The work is solid, but is not necessarily innovative or creative. The otherwise ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ work is marred by careless editing or poor presentation.

5-6 LESS THAN SATISFACTORY The work shows incomplete mastery of the subject. The work exhibits major spelling and grammar errors or is very sloppy. The assignment is incomplete or fails to follow the instructions. The assignment is turned in outside of class-time.

1-4 POOR The student’s work shows gaps in understanding, is very sloppy, or is incomplete.

0 NOT ACCEPTABLE The student’s work does not satisfy the learning requirements of this exercise. The student failed to turn in an assignment altogether.

Assignments are due IN CLASS on the date listed
Late assignments will be accepted, but penalized.
Assignment #1

**Conducting Ethical Research**

**Grading:** 10 points

**Objective:**
- To learn about research ethics and the IRB
- To become a certified social and behavioral science researcher

**Assignment:** Complete the on-line training program provided.

1. Go to the following website: [www.citiprogram.org](http://www.citiprogram.org)

2. Follow the links and directions to establish a “new user” account. This should be pretty self-explanatory, but here are a few tips anyway: Your participating organization is “University of Utah.” Your research role is “Student Researcher-Undergraduate.” A home or cell number can be used for your “office phone number.”

3. On the “Select Groups” page, choose the following two options:
   - Group 2.: Social / Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel.
   - I have not previously completed an approved Basic Course.
   It will then ask you if you need to take the training for more than one institution, say “No”

4. You will now be taken to your personal homepage. Look for the link under “My Courses – Human Research.” Enter the module and begin the lessons. There are 16 modules. You will need to read through each module and then answer the quiz at the end of each module. You can re-take the quizzes as many times as you need to. The software program only records your latest quiz grade. Note: the average learner spends approximately 4.5 hrs in the Basic Course site and uses approximately 5 logins to complete the course.

5. After you finished all modules, download and print your “completion certificate” showing the date you completed and passed each of the modules. That print-out is all you need to turn in. If you did not finish the whole training, turn in a print-out of the “gradebook” showing which modules you completed and which ones you did not complete. (partial credit will be available).
Assignment #2  Topic Approval

Grading: 10 points

Objective:  To think about what types of topics are suitable for your final project
To identify the difference between a research topic, question, and hypothesis.

Assignment: You do not need to do any additional research for this assignment. You simply
need to think through the various steps of narrowing a broad topic into a manageable research
project.

Note: Each group member must do this assignment individually.
1. What is a possible topic for your final project? A topic can be just about anything. It will
likely be a single word or concept.

2. Next, write a specific research question or questions related to that topic. Is your question
descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, or evaluative? You may need to write several questions
to help you narrow the topic.

3. Now state a specific hypothesis or hypotheses related to what you think is the best research
question? A hypothesis identifies a clear independent and dependent variable. It states a
direction of association (positive, negative, neutral). It can usually be written into an “if,
than” statement. Even a research question that is sufficiently narrow (especially those that are
more descriptive) may have multiple hypotheses.

4. Describe why you think the hypotheses are in the direction that you stated. This
explanation or discussion would be the start of your “theoretical framework”
Assignment #3  Conducting Literature Reviews

Grading: 10 points

Objective:  To practice using the library catalogues and databases
            To begin collecting journal articles for your research project
            To learn how to read/summarize published journal articles

Assignment: Conduct a literature review to find at least FIVE journal articles that may be
relevant to your approved topic and research question. You should use the databases provided
by the library. Print/copy a full-text version of each article, read each of them, summarize the
article in your own words, and then think about how each article may be relevant to your
particular research project.

Note: Each group member must do this assignment individually.
1. Turn in the full-text printout of all 5 articles you selected.

2. Write a short essay (1 page or less) describing how you conducted your literature review:
which databases did you use, how did you access those databases, and what types of search
terms did you use to find the articles, etc.

3. Write a formal citation for each selected article. A formal citation includes the authors’
   names, the publication year, the title of the article, the title of the journal in which it was
   published, as well as the volume and page numbers of the article. You can use any
   bibliographic style you want (MLA, Chicago, APA); just be consistent. An example of a
   formal citation is below.


4. Write a short abstract summarizing each article – its purpose, method, and results. Each
abstract must be written in your own words and be approximately ½ page long. Note:
plagiarism of published abstracts will be grounds for a “0” on this assignment.

5. For each article, write a few notes about how or why the article is relevant to your
particular study. You should have at least two or three “notes” for each article. These notes
can be written somewhat informally, in bullet-point style.
Assignment #4  Writing a Draft “Intro”

Grading: 10 points

Objectives: To integrate your research topic/question with your literature review
To produce a draft of an “introduction” section for your final report

Assignment: Write a draft of the introduction section to your final research project. An introduction section presents the research topic/question and hypothesis. It should set up a “theoretical framework” from which the research question can be understood conceptually. The introduction also reviews previous literature and discusses how your research project is new or different and how it complements or contradicts the existing knowledge on the topic. In general, this section needs to discuss the importance of the topic and the rationale underlying the hypothesis.

The draft will probably be 2-4 pages of double spaced text. You must formally cite relevant literature, including the 5 articles you identified in the previous assignment. A citation within the text should be placed in parentheses, immediately following the text you want to reference. The citation has the authors name and publication year, plus page number if you are using a direct quote or even an indirect quote about a specific passage in the article. Look at how the articles you have read for this project do this, and follow the styles of one of them.
Assignment #5

Writing a Good Survey

Grading: 10 points

Objective: To practice writing survey questions
To think about the layout and design of a survey

Assignment: Write a draft survey related to your approved research topic and question. The survey document should have at least 10 questions. The survey document should be formatted, according to the principles of good questionnaire design. The survey must ask questions related to both your independent and dependent variables. If you are writing a series of survey questions that address a single concept that will later be combined into a scale/index, describe how that scale/index will be calculated in your “notes” sheet. Include with your survey a “notes” page that lists your specific research question and hypothesis. The “notes” page should also describe any additional notes or logic you were using when you designed the survey – for example, who would fill out this survey? Where might you distribute it? Would it be better administered via the phone or email or in person? Why did you format it the way you did? Why did you write questions in the way you did?

Note: Each group member must do this assignment individually.
Assignment #6  Collecting Qualitative Data

Grading: 10 points

Objective: To try collecting qualitative types of data
To think about how to design a qualitative study
To reflect on the differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods

Assignment: Conduct a mini observational study or in-depth interview related to your research question. Choose between option A or B.

A. OBSERVATIONAL METHOD: Pick a location to observe. Your location and observations should be chosen because you think they will help answer your particular research question. Observe it for 90 minutes (all at once or in three 30-minute blocks). Prior to observing the location, you need to think specifically about what aspect of the setting or interaction you will observe. What types of observations will most answer your particular research question. While observing, take field notes describing exactly what you observed. Refer to the lecture notes and textbooks for the principles of good field notes. Turn in a copy of ALL field notes (no matter how messy they are), plus a response paper summarizing the results of your data collection effort, as well as your experience and reactions to this type of data collection. In your essay, you should reflect on the following types of questions:

1. Was it easy or difficult to collect data in this way?

2. How accurate (or inaccurate) do you think your field notes are?

3. What do you think your results may be?

4. What research question(s) could you have answered using your observations?

5. Is your particular research question more suited to quantitative (survey) or qualitative types of data? Why?

B. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING METHOD: Conduct an in-depth interview(s) related to your particular research question. The total interview time should be approximately 60 minutes, so it is likely that you will need to conduct two 30-minute interviews. Prior to the interview, you need to develop a list of interview prompts and grand-tour questions. During the interview, you need to take notes to help you remember the respondents’ answers and discussions. You may choose to record the interview and devise your transcript notes later. Turn in a copy of ALL interview prompts and notes/transcripts, plus a response paper summarizing the results of your data collection effort, as well as your reactions to this type of data collection. In your essay, you should reflect on the following types of questions:
1. Was it easy or hard to collect data in this way?

2. How accurate (or inaccurate) do you think your interview notes are?

3. What do you think your results may be? Are there particular quotes or stories or examples that were revealed during the interview that could be used to illustrate your findings?

4. What research question(s) could you have answered using your observations?

5. Is your particular research question more suited to quantitative (survey) or qualitative types of data? Why?
Assignment #7  Draft of the “Method” Section

Grading: 10 points

Objective:  To practice writing technical research methods
           To describe the data collection strategies you used in your final project

Assignment: Write a draft “method” section of your final project. A method section typically contains the following three elements: a description of the sample and sampling strategy, a description of the methods you will use to collect data from the sampled persons, and a description of how exactly you will measure the concepts and variables of interest. It should detail all the information that someone would need to know if they were to replicate your project. Include as many details as possible, while still being concise. Your writing should be technical, concise, and detailed. The draft will probably be 1½ to 3 pages double-spaced.
Assignment #8  Draft of the “Results” Section

Grading: 10 points

Objective: To practice writing research results
To learn how to present data in a visual way (tables, charts)
To conduct an analysis of your data

Assignment: Write a draft “results” section of your final project. A results section describes your data. It “tells the story” found within your data. Before writing this section, you need to spend time thinking through how you can best summarize the massive amounts of data you collected and the many analyses you conducted. Remember that you will likely conduct a lot more analyses than you will ultimately present in your final report. Pick and choose the best way to describe your results. The presentation of results must try to answer your original research question or be used to support/refute the hypothesis. The results section does not have any interpretation or discussion of the findings; it simply reports the findings without editorializing them. You need to summarize your research findings in both a graphical/tabular format, as well as in the text. Your draft must contain at least one table or figure. All tables/figures need to be appropriately labeled, titled, and referred to and described in the text.

Your writing style should be technical, concise, and detailed. The draft will probably be 1 ½ to 3 pages double-spaced.
Assignment #9

Self-Evaluation & Self-Reflection

Grading: 10 points

Objective: To reflect on what you learned this semester
To honestly assess what type of grade you think you deserve in this course

Assignment: Write a short essay reflecting on what you learned throughout the semester (no longer than 1 single-spaced page or 2 double-spaced pages). Think about whether you gained any skills or knowledge that you will be able to use in the future. Did you participate fully in the activities and lectures?

At the end of the essay, you should clearly state how many points (out of 10) you think you deserve as a grade for this course: “Based on my effort, participation, and learning this semester, I believe I deserve ___ out of 10 points.” Be honest, be fair, and do not hesitate to give yourself full points if you believe you deserve them. You should refer back to the 10-point grading criteria before assigning yourself a grade. Your essay must include specific examples and/or reasons justifying the grade you gave yourself.
Final Research Project

The goals of this assignment are to 1) participate in all steps of the research process 2) write a formal research report describing each phase of the research process, and 3) present and discuss research findings during the “Student Conference” at the end of the semester.

Due Date: The written report is due by 6pm on Wednesday December 16 in Professor Timberlake’s office (426 BEHS). Late papers will be accepted (minus a 10-point penalty for each day it is late), if received by 5pm on December 18.

The presentations will take place during the final two class periods of the semester, December 2 and 9.

Groups: Students are encouraged to work in groups throughout the semester to complete this project, but each student must write his/her own final project. Students have the option of working individually as well.

• Ideal group size is about four students.

• Groups will choose a single topic and method for their research project, but each individual will write his/her own paper and complete his/her own assignments.

• Presentations will be done as groups.

• Each student will have the opportunity to evaluate the effort of his/her group members.

Length of Report: The text of your research report should be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point font, and use one-inch margins. The report will probably be about 10 pages in length. It is unlikely that you will be able to do the project in less than 8 pages or that it would exceed 15 pages. Field notes, appendices, and/or interview transcriptions will not count toward page length.

Format of Report: The final report will follow the standard format of a published research articles. It must include an abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, and references section. Use these subheadings when writing your final report:

Abstract: Summarize entire project: from theory to method to results to implications. Be concise (< 200 words).

Introduction: In this section, you should explicitly tell the reader what your research questions and hypotheses are. You should also describe any previous research that has been done on the topic. Think about how your project is new or different than previous research. Discuss why your chosen method is an appropriate way to try to answer the question.

Methods: In this section, you will tell the reader how you collected your data, how you drew your sample, how you measured the concepts of interest. You must be detailed enough so that
someone could replicate your study. In terms of how much data you should collect, follow the guidelines below:
Survey Research: approx ten surveys per group member.
In-Depth Interviewing: at least one interview per group member.
Focus Groups: one group/session per group member.
Participant Observation ask instructor
Archival Research: ask instructor

Results: Summarize all the data you collected. Highlight the trends, patterns, tendencies, and/or themes found within your collected data. As an analyst, you need to think about how to most accurately and succinctly “tell the story” that is found in your data. Although it is not required, you are encouraged to analyze your data using software programs such as SPSS or Excel (both available on campus) or HyperResearch (included with book). If you use statistical analyses, I do not expect you to do more than descriptive analyses (e.g., means, medians, crosstabs, etc). If you do qualitative or archival research, you should use original quotations to support your findings. Be creative – and use whatever analytic skills you and your group members have.

Discussion: This is the section where you will discuss the results of your project. Did the data support hypotheses? Why or why not? What are the strengths and limitations of your project? How could future research address those limitations? What are the implications/importance/relevance of your research findings to policy, practices, theory, etc.?

References: This final section of the paper lists the sources you consulted while writing this report. You must include at least 5 academic sources, which must also be appropriately cited/referenced in the text. Use a formal bibliographic style to write this section.
NOTE: If you are unfamiliar with writing a formal reference list, please ask the instructor during office hours or consult one of the many available handbooks such as the APA Publications Manual, the MLA handbook, or the Chicago Style Book. NOTE: Internet sites are NOT considered “academic” sources. While encyclopedias may have been fine for high school research papers, they are NOT acceptable forms of research for this project. As a scientist, you should NEVER conduct your research by “Google-ing” your topic. Focus your literature review on academic journals, such as the American Journal of Sociology or the American Sociological Review. Books are also acceptable sources. Please ask the instructor for additional explanation or consult with the reference desk at the Marriott library.

Grading Criteria for Final Project

CONTENT OF WRITTEN REPORT

_________ out of 5 pts Abstract
Concise overview of project that includes a statement summarizing each section of the paper

_________ out of 10 pts Intro
Includes a statement of the objectives, research question, and hypotheses.
Uses the literature review to describe previous research on the topic and to explain the theory behind the hypotheses. Discusses how this research project is new or different from previous research.

_______ out of 10 pts Methods
Describes how the data were collected, how the concepts were measured, and how the sample was selected. Also discusses why this particular set of methods is appropriate.

_______ out of 10 pts Results
What are the trends/patterns/themes that emerged from the data? Were tables/charts/statistics/quotations used effectively to describe the results? Use the analytic skills you have to “tell the story” found in your data.

_______ out of 10 pts Discussion
Was the hypothesis supported? Why or Why not? What are the strengths/limitations of this project? Discusses future research areas, as well as the relevance/importance of these research findings.

_______ out of 10 pts References
Did you use 5 academic sources and cited them in a formal style (both in text and in the reference list). Do NOT use internet cites for this project!

QUALITY OF WRITING
How well-written is the report?

_______ out of 15 pts I will consider the quality of your logic and explanations. For example, how critical is the discussion; how accurate the explanation?

_______ out of 10 pts Are there typos? I will consider the appropriate use of punctuation, grammar, spelling.

ORAL PRESENTATION OF PROJECT
Did you present the project effectively and creatively? Did you use visual displays, if appropriate, to help communicate your findings? How well did you answer questions from the audience? Did you stay within the allotted time limit? NOTE: All group members will receive the same grade, regardless of who actually presents the results. If a group member is not present for the presentation, he/she will receive 0.

_______ out of 10 pts

INDIVIDUAL EFFORT
Each student will rank the other students in his/her group on a ten-point scale. Consider each others’ level of effort and participation throughout the semester. Each student will receive a different score, depending on the average of the peer evaluations he/she receives. If you worked individually, your final project grade will be calculated based on 90 points, rather than 100 points.

_______ out of 10 pts